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ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT

Observance of World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought: implementation of resolution 49/115

Report of the Secretary-General

A. Introduction

1. By its resolution 49/115 of 19 December 1995, the General Assembly proclaimed 17 June World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, to be observed beginning in 1995.

2. In that resolution, the Assembly invited all States to devote the World Day to promoting public awareness on international cooperation to combat desertification and the effects of drought and on the implementation of the Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa.

3. It further invited the Secretary-General (a) to make recommendations on ways and means by which the Secretariat could assist Member States, upon their request, in organizing their national activities for the observance of the World Day, and (b) to make the necessary arrangements to ensure the success of the observance by the United Nations of the World Day.

4. The present report reviews measures taken in implementation of resolution 49/115. It is closely related to document A/50/515, reviewing measures taken pursuant to resolution 49/234 of 23 December 1994 on the elaboration of an international convention to combat desertification in those countries experiencing serious drought and/or desertification, particularly in Africa.

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B. Ways and means by which the Secretariat could assist Member States in organizing their national activities

5. Ways and means by which the interim secretariat could assist Member States, upon their request, in organizing their national activities for the observance of the World Day are summarized below. It is understood, of course, that assistance by the Secretariat can only be provided within the limit of its resources.

6. Within this context, the Secretariat could provide assistance, upon the request of Member States, through one or more of the following measures:

(a) Facilitating the procurement of information kits on the Convention comprising the text of the Convention in booklet format, an explanatory leaflet and fact sheets, as well as a simplified guide to the Convention;

(b) Facilitating the procurement of background materials to Member States for dissemination;

(c) Providing advice and suggestions on activities, based on previous experiences;

(d) Giving advice on how best to involve non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and how to relate to the NGO network;

(e) Making staff members of the Secretariat available to assist in selected events of particular significance;

(f) Preparing a compilation of the various celebrations and/or activities world wide and making such information available through electronic means.

C. Arrangements to ensure the success of the observance by the United Nations of the World Day

7. Consistent with the resolution, the interim secretariat and United Nations programmes and specialized agencies held, on 17 June 1995, a number of activities and events in various capitals world wide. The main purpose of these activities was to raise public awareness and target special audiences with a view to ensuring the successful implementation of the Convention. These were in addition to awareness days and other activities at the national and subregional levels held during that period, to implement resolution 5/1 adopted by the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for the Elaboration of an International Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa, on urgent measures for Africa, and interim action in other regions.

8. Major activities included the following:

(a) A policy dialogue in Geneva on the theme "Combating desertification through alternative energy strategies: a focus on Africa" and a briefing

session for the media, organized by the interim secretariat and the International Academy of Environmental Safety;

(b) The production and launching of (i) a simplified version of the Convention entitled "Down to Earth" jointly produced by the interim secretariat and the Centre for our Common Future, with the financial support of the Government of Switzerland, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), (ii) a Convention kit comprising a booklet, an explanatory leaflet and 10 fact sheets, and (iii) a simplified guide to the Convention;

(c) The production by the interim secretariat, in cooperation with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), of a video report filmed in Cape Verde and Mauritania, portraying the causes and effects of desertification;

(d) A presentation ceremony and awards for effective action against desertification by UNEP, and celebrations for Desertification Day in Nairobi, as well as a UNEP-sponsored regional conference on desertification in Almaty;

(e) A seminar on desertification and drought organized by IFAD in Rome, as well as the launching of the publication "Down to Earth", a press briefing and a joint celebration by IFAD and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO);

(f) An exhibition, an information brochure on its activities and a public meeting organized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in Paris, together with the Observatory of Sahara and Sahel (OSS);

(g) The production of posters, pamphlets, press releases, as well as the holding of interviews and press briefings by various agencies and programmes;

(h) Many activities of a similar nature organized by subregional organizations, Governments and NGOs at the subregional and national levels.

9. In addition to the above, two campaigns were mounted jointly by Earth Action, a London-based NGO, and the interim secretariat, one aimed at the media and the other at parliamentarians. The campaigns comprised an editorial advisory and a parliamentary alert on desertification.